

The Bike Belles Guide

For women who want to cycle





Why cycle?

With high profile women such as Erin O'Connor, Lily Cole, Elle Macpherson and Madonna taking to two wheels, it was surprising that Sustrans' research found that 79% of women don't cycle, with less than one in ten women cycling more than once a month.

We'd like to help women redress the cycling gender imbalance and inspire more of you onto your bikes.

Riding a bike keeps you fit and gets you where you want to go. It's fast, reliable and if you ride regularly, you'll save a small fortune on travel, leaving you with more cash to treat yourself.

By swapping four wheels for two, you'll be helping the environment, too.

Inside:

Buying a bike

Types of bike

Staying safe

Women's experiences

Accessories

Looking good

Cycling and pregnancy

Where do I find out more?

Getting out into the fresh air on your bike burns the calories, gets your heart pumping and even works the abs. It can also lift your mood, put a smile on your face and improve your general well-being!

Cycling raises your metabolic rate, which can help to keep weight off. Moderate pedal-pushing burns up to 500 calories per hour, which is more than walking or swimming.

A 20-minute bike ride to work could use the same amount of calories as a cappuccino, a bar of chocolate or a 175ml glass of wine.

Riding a bike to work, to the shops, to see friends or with the kids to school are ideal ways to fit this healthy way to travel into your daily routine.

The full benefits of regular physical exercise for women can be found in Sustrans' Active Travel and Women's Health information sheet, available to download from www.sustrans.org.uk

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As someone who cycles to work every day, I'm very aware of the benefits that cycling brings, helping to keep me fit, healthy and happy.

Dr Alice Roberts –
human anatomy
expert and TV
presenter

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Choosing the right bike for you



If you are going to be riding your bike for any length of time, it's important you choose one that you'll love - it will become your indispensable travelling companion.

It's a girl thing

We don't need to explain the birds and the bees to you, but there are some obvious physical differences between men and women and bikes are designed with this in mind.

On a classic woman's frame the crossbar is dropped. Some are dropped much lower so you can step through the frame which makes it much more practical if you cycle in a skirt or a dress.

Frames for women tend to be shorter as on average we have longer legs and shorter torsos and arms. A shorter frame also means less reach from the saddle to the handlebars, and prevents the uncomfortable 'Superman' riding position.

It's an idea to make sure your bike has a decent saddle as it's where you'll be sat for every journey. Female-specific saddles are traditionally wider at the back and narrower at the front and should completely support your bottom. Make sure that your 'sit bones' (the two that support your body when you sit) don't go over the sides of the saddle, as this could cause discomfort.

A classic man's frame



A classic woman's frame



A step through frame





Buying the right sized frame is the most important thing when choosing your bike. This will depend on the type of bike you want, and the type of riding you'll be doing. If you need to stop quickly, you'll be glad that you chose a frame size that gives you clearance of the crossbar of at least two centimetres or more.

Many retailers will let you test-ride their bikes, to make sure you're choosing the right type of bike and frame size. Once you're happy with your choice, the handlebars, saddle height and tilt can be adjusted for comfort, pedal-power and control. Reputable bike shops will normally do all of this for you.



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Reliable, low maintenance and helps you to look good – a girl's best friend has to be her bike!

Dawn Porter – author, journalist and TV presenter

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Everyday commuting bikes

Hybrid bikes



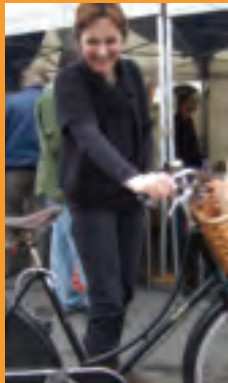
Generally a great everyday option, hybrids combine the speed of a road bike with the sturdiness of a mountain bike. They have an upright riding position and are ideal for cycling in traffic, and commuting through town.

Folding bikes



These bikes are wonderfully versatile, especially for commuting. Folding them up is easy and they are becoming lighter and easier to carry. They're perfect for short hops to the bus or train station, and tuck easily under desks or into cupboards once you reach your destination.

Dutch-style 'sit-up-and-beg' bikes



These stylish options are seen in their thousands on the continent. The upright sitting position makes them great for cycling through traffic, as you can easily see what's happening around you. The iron frame can make for a heavy bike, but the low crossbar makes mounting and dismounting easy and graceful.

Electrically-assisted bikes



These bikes are ideal if you have a long commute, or lots of hills to conquer. The power kicks in automatically or on demand, depending on which model you choose. You can still get fit with one of these bikes, but remember that they do need to be charged up, so there will be some running costs and carbon emissions involved.



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I use an electric bike at work, where two are provided for use by staff during work and at lunchtimes. I really rate them, and use one at least twice a week to go swimming. They're great for attending meetings where there is limited parking, and you won't turn up in a sweat!

Melissa Burrow, Travel Plan Officer, Cornwall Council

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Sports and specialist bikes



Mountain bikes

Mountain bikes come in a variety of models. Some have front suspension, some have rear suspension and some have both. Suspension helps to cushion the bumps, and comes into its own when off-road on rough ground such as forest trails. The tyres are often thick, knobbly and suitable for gripping rough surfaces, but these can easily be changed for slick tyres which are more suitable for road riding.



Road bikes

Also known as racers, road bikes have very lightweight frames with skinny tyres and usually, drop handlebars. They are designed to be aerodynamic and speedy. The hi-tech versions are

perfect for aspiring Olympic road race champions like Nicole Cooke and lower spec models are great for nipping around town.

Recumbent bikes



These bikes are low to the ground, with the rider sitting in a reclining position. They can be beneficial to

people with back or knee problems who experience discomfort with traditional upright riding positions.



Touring bikes

These bikes are similar to road bikes in that they are lightweight, but they are much sturdier. They are suitable for riding long

distances and will be designed to accommodate panniers, too. Perfect for your cycling holidays!

Tricycles



Tricycles may have two wheels at the front and one at the back or vice versa, and are perfect for people who need more than two wheels for support. They're

useful for disabled and visually-impaired riders; those who are getting back into cycling after a long break; or those recovering from an illness.



BMX bikes

BMXing has always been a popular sport for the boys, but the discipline has recently had a boost in popularity thanks to BMX racer Shanaze Reade. BMX bikes are great fun, super cool and a nippy way of getting round town.

Not got enough cash to splash on a new bike?

Cyclescheme.co.uk is a tax incentive scheme that could save you money on the price of your bike and accessories and allow you to pay for them in stages through 'salary sacrifice'.

You can also find cheap reconditioned bikes at local bike recycling projects.

Riding with confidence

When Sustrans conducted a survey of 1,000 women, the most common reason given for not cycling was not feeling safe enough.

Whether you're riding on the road or on a path shared by cyclists and pedestrians, here's some straightforward advice to make your journeys safer and more enjoyable.

When planning your route, it's a good idea to aim for quiet streets and cycle paths.

There are lots of traffic-free cycle routes out there, which are ideal if you're new to cycling or haven't ridden for ages and want to build up your confidence in safe surroundings.

Check out

www.sustransshop.org.uk for cycle route maps near you, call Sustrans' information team on 0845 113 0065 or use our online mapping at www.sustrans.org.uk/map

Hints and tips

Keep your bike in good shape by carrying out regular checks. It's easier to do repairs at home or in a bike shop than at the side of the road.

A bell, lights, lock and a pump are essential accessories. Carrying a spare inner tube is a good idea just in case you get a puncture en route.

Plan your route first, as getting lost is no fun! Don't cycle anywhere you wouldn't feel safe walking, and steer away from secluded or dimly lit areas at night.

Always lock your bike to reduce the risk of theft – and of leaving you stranded. If your front wheel is 'quick-release', try to lock both the wheel and the frame to the post or fence.

Helmets aren't compulsory in the UK, and it's a matter of personal choice if you decide to wear one. We would however, strongly recommend them for children.



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I know lots of people are put off cycling by feeling a lack of safety. I am an orthopaedic surgeon and see very few cycling-related injuries each year, but hundreds of fractures due to osteoporosis, caused by lack of sunlight and exercise.

Scarlett McNally, BSc MB BChir FRCS (Eng) FRCS (Tr and Orth) MA

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Six top bike tips – by bike mechanic Laura Pringle

1

Keep it clean – wash down with soap, dry, then lubricate all the moving parts

2

Keep tyres pumped up to help avoid punctures – the recommended pressure is usually stamped on the side of the tyre



3

Lubricate the chain with oil at least once a month



4

Quickly check your bike (gears, brakes, tyres and lights before setting off)



5

Get it serviced regularly by a good bike mechanic – and once you've found a good mechanic, treasure them!



6

Learn how to fix a puncture and carry a spare inner tube and pump with you



“

To stay safe on my bike, I've found that it's quite important to be assertive when riding around. You shouldn't shy away and be meek but should take ownership of your part of the road. I know you probably have to have quite a bit of confidence to do this but it is worth practicing.

Sarah Gardiner, Museum Print Production Coordinator, London

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Bike buddying



Want to feel a bit safer on the roads? One great confidence booster is to find someone to cycle with. Having a bike buddy might encourage you to cycle more; they're great company and pairing up with a more experienced cyclist will help build up your cycle skills, too.

There are various means of finding a bike buddy. You can put notices on boards at work, the library or in local publications. There is also **www.bikebudi.com**, a free online system that matches people up with others cycling in the same direction so they can ride together.

Once you find someone to cycle with, it's probably a good idea to meet them first so you can discuss where you want to go and plan a route finding the safest, most direct (or indeed the most scenic) route. It doesn't just have to be about getting from A to B either; rides may simply be for leisure or pleasure.

Your bike buddy will probably know where the best local routes, quiet streets and cycle paths are. By seeing first hand how they cope with junctions, roundabouts and other road users, they can help you negotiate the traffic with skill and self-assurance. Sometimes even just one accompanied trip can make a huge difference.

By joining local cycling groups and rides you can meet more experienced cyclists, and make new friends.



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I'd highly recommend bike buddying. It's a great way to pass on the help you've received. For women in particular, having some company on your first few rides can make all the difference.

Rachael Wood, Production Journalist, London

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Cycle training

If you don't feel confident about jumping on a bike straight away, especially if you haven't ridden for a long time, then a cycle training session could work wonders for you.



Even if you consider yourself an experienced cyclist, there are always extra things that can be learnt from a cycle training session.

Known as Bikeability (cycling proficiency for the 21st Century) cycle training will give you the skills and confidence to cycle in modern road conditions with skill and self-assurance.

Some local authorities, employers, colleges and universities provide training for free or at a discount, so it's a good idea to check if they offer this.

How can I find cycle training in my area?

Phone the **National Cycle Training Helpline** on **0844 736 8460**. They will be able to recommend a good trainer in your area and there are lots of female instructors if you want one.

There is also a database of Bikeability registered providers at www.bikeability.org.uk

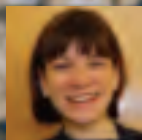


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Since doing cycle training I have cycled pretty much every day, using the roads and feeling safe. I would recommend training to everyone.

Cheryl Bevan,
Compliance
Administrator for an
Ethical Bank, Bristol

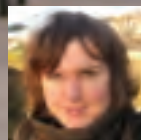
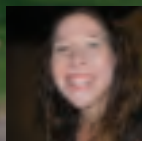
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“Getting on my bike immediately makes me feel happy and free! It’s a fun thing to do, as well as the necessity of being outside and getting some exercise. A perfect therapy.”
Linda Keys, Charity Development Worker, Edinburgh

“Cycling means you are more in touch with the environment around you; you’ll notice new things and changes to existing places. Plus, you’ll always get to your destination in the same time.”

Cheryl Bevan, Compliance Administrator for an Ethical Bank, Bristol

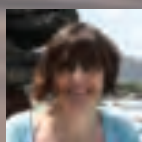


“I would love people to think that cycling is actually not really that special, it’s just a way of getting around and you don’t really need any special clothing to do it.”
Sarah Gardiner, Museum Print Production Coordinator, London



"I'm now nearly 71 and I ride my bike during the summer, for my health as well as for leisure. I would say to all the youngsters and their parents: keep cycling as long as you can."

Beryl Kutschera, Berkshire



"Although it's been a long time since I've ridden a bike, I soon got the hang of it. I've now discovered places that I didn't know existed."

Karen Clarke, Planning Executive, Hertfordshire



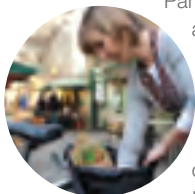
"I have a Dutch upright bike which I've had for ten years. It's been the best investment I've ever made; it's been my free transport, my form of exercise, my provider of 'me time', my time saver and my total independence all these years."

Sally Guyer, Teacher, Cambridge

Bike luggage

There are lots of solutions for carrying the things you need. It's amazing what you can fit on a bike.

Panniers and racks



Panniers are bags which attach onto pannier racks, usually at the back of the bike. You can buy bikes which come complete with pannier

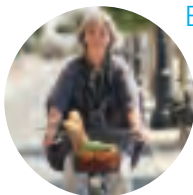
racks, or you can buy them separately and attach them yourself. Front pannier racks are also available if you prefer to have your things in view, or have a lot to carry; they're great for touring holidays.

There are some amazingly funky panniers on the market. These are mainly available online, but retailers are quickly catching on to the idea that women want something a bit more stylish to carry their belongings, so you may start seeing them in your local bike shops soon.

You can buy panniers and other accessories at
www.sustransshop.org.uk

All sales directly benefit our work.

Baskets



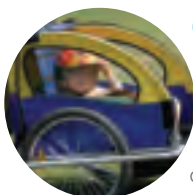
Baskets not only look great, they're really practical, too. You can keep your things in sight and they're even suitable for carrying pets. Customise your basket for an individual touch.

Trailers



Trailers let you carry shopping, pets and children – anything you want really! You might be surprised at how much you can carry on a bike.

Children's bicycle seats, tagalongs and trailers



Babies can be carried on bicycles as soon as they can support their own head, and solutions for transporting children by bike progress with their age.

For more information, check out
www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids



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I bought a lovely pannier which is mint green and has red cherries on it. It's a brilliant size and is big enough for me to cycle to training sessions with all my resources packed neatly inside.

Linda Keys, Charity Development Worker, Edinburgh

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Accessories

Here's our guide to optional accessories for your everyday journeys.

1

Locks

Make sure you invest in a good lock, no matter what the value of your bike. A good lock will set you back around £30 but is entirely justified for peace of mind that your beloved bicycle is safe. A D-lock (pictured) is generally regarded as the most secure type. Choose a size that can be attached to your bike frame via a bracket.



2

Helmets

Wearing a helmet is a matter of personal choice for adults, though we strongly recommend them for children.



There's a staggering range of helmets available, with more styles emerging for the fashion conscious. If you're feeling creative you can always customise yours.

3

Bicycle pumps and puncture repair kits

These are cheap and really useful to have (and to know how to use!). They are readily available from local bike shops.



4

Bicycle bells

Though it's now compulsory for new bikes to be sold with bells on, you don't legally need to have a bell on your bike. However, they're advisable for your own safety, and for the safety of other road or route users. You can get simple flick bells, or go for a vintage 'brrring brrring' variety to let people know of your impending arrival.



5

Lights

If you'll be doing any cycling in the dark, then by law you must have a set of lights. Front lights are white and back lights are red. Most lights can be detached from the bike once you have locked it up.



6

Mudguards

Located just above the tyres, these narrow metal or plastic strips are essential if you don't want rain or mud sprayed up onto your clothes.



What to wear

For the majority of short local cycling trips, there's generally no need to wear special clothing. It's fine to cycle in skirts and dresses if they give you enough freedom to pedal.

Long, flowing skirts can be clipped in the middle with a clothes peg to keep them out of moving parts and to stop the wind blowing them around. Some bikes have dress guards on the rear to stop them from going into the wheel.

For shorter skirts, wearing tights, leggings or shorts underneath will keep your modesty intact.

If you have long, wide-leg trousers, there are a number of ways to keep them away from the chain. Try cycle clips, elastic bands, Velcro ankle bands (slap-bands) or even legwarmers.

The golden rule is to wear what you like and feel comfortable in.

A breathable waterproof jacket will keep out the rain. Waterproof trousers aren't sexy, but they will keep you dry. Put them on top of your normal clothes and whip them off on arrival to reveal your clean, dry self.

If it's a cold day, wearing several light layers rather than one chunky item will trap warm air and keep you warmer. Your fingers will thank you if you wear a good pair of gloves to stop them freezing.

Scarves also help keep you warm; just make sure that long scarves are kept away from any moving parts. Earmuffs look great and keep your ears safe from wind-chill too.

There's no reason you can't cycle in heels, though if this doesn't appeal, wear flats for the journey then slip back into your heels once you reach your destination.



“

I hate getting wet feet so if there is any danger of rain or if the roads are wet, I wear my wellington boots. It also means my legs don't get splashed with mud marks if I am wearing a skirt.

Jane Hornsby,
University
Administrator,
Oxfordshire

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Beauty tips

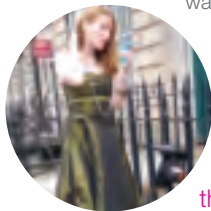
For short journeys it's often quicker to cycle than to walk, drive or take public transport which leaves you time to pace yourself.

To avoid arriving hot and sweaty, take it steady.



Journey times are more predictable when you travel by bike, so you'll soon be able to gauge how long a journey will take. If you do want to raise your heart rate a

little, then take some wet wipes and deodorant with you for a quick freshen up.



Riding a bike is good for your health and all that fresh air is good for

your skin. More than likely, you'll

arrive at your destination with a beautiful healthy glow. Use waterproof mascara when it's raining on your bike, and take a powder compact for a quick refresher on arrival.

Helmet hair can be an issue. You can tie back long hair, or secure further in a french plait. Wearing a silk scarf under your helmet can also protect your hair and keep it frizz free. Take a comb or brush with you to revive your style when you reach your destination.

Using panniers rather than wearing a rucksack will stop you from getting a sweaty back.

On hot summer days, wear a vest or t-shirt under your clothes in case you get sweaty. You can remove it once you arrive at your destination, leaving your clothes clean and dry.



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God forbid that I should ignore my passion for clothes just because I love my bike.

Laura Tenison MBE, founder of Jojo Maman Bébé

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Cycling during pregnancy

As with any form of exercise whilst pregnant, it's always best to check with your GP before you start. Make sure you only do what you feel personally comfortable with. Some women cycle right up to their eighth month of pregnancy, yet some will stop after just a few, so there are no hard and fast rules. Every body and every pregnancy is different.

Regular physical activity during pregnancy can help towards improving mood and self image, ensure appropriate weight gain, reduce stress, promote better sleep, increase muscle tone, strength and endurance, help build stamina for labour and delivery, speed up recovery after labour and delivery, and help increase energy levels¹.

If, in the latter stages of your pregnancy, you feel that cycling has become uncomfortable then do stop. Once you're ready to cycle with the new addition to your family, check out <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/freerangekids> for tips and advice on travelling with children by bike.

(1) **Government of Canada** <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/known-savoir/phys-eng.php>

Top tips for bumps on bikes

Alongside this wide range of benefits, there are certain things to take into account when thinking about cycling during your pregnancy:

- as you'll be carrying extra weight during your pregnancy, be aware that it may take you longer to stop, so take this into account when braking
- as you get bigger, you'll find you have to get used to the changes in the distribution of your weight, and you may need to adjust your saddle and handle bars
- raising your handlebars as your stomach expands will help to keep you more upright
- drink plenty of water to avoid overheating and de-hydration
- don't overdo it - stop if you feel short of breath or dizzy.



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I continued to cycle during all three of my pregnancies. I'm currently six months pregnant and make sure I leave enough time for getting to my destination without having to rush. I've also been known to walk my bike along steep hills particularly as my due date approaches. I love the fact that I can still exercise and get fresh air as well.

Catherine Jolliffe, Owner of an Eco Cleaning Company, Bristol

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Useful Links

Where do
I find out
more?

www.sustrans.org.uk

This guide is brought to you by Sustrans, the charity that's enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day.

Use our mapping online or download the FREE iphone or android apps for your phone to see where you can cycle.

www.sustransshop.org.uk

Visit our online shop for a great range of maps, guides, clothing and accessories.

www.bikeforall.net

A useful site with all manner of cycling hints, tips and information, including a detailed description of the Cycle to Work scheme.

www.ctc.org.uk

The CTC is the UK's national cyclists' organisation and campaigns to look after the interests of cyclists.

www.thecyclingexperts.co.uk

Find your local independent bike shop.

www.bikebudi.com

A scheme that matches individuals cycling the same way so they can ride together.

www.copenhagencyclechic.com

A blog showing how stylish people on bikes do it in Copenhagen.

<http://londoncyclechic.blogspot.com/>

A blog-styled site with hints, tips, and fabulous fashion ideas.

<http://velo-city-girl.blogspot.com/>

A female blogger who writes about cycling and fashion.

www.cyclestreets.net/

<http://directgov.transportdirect.info>

Both sites provide a cycle journey planner.

Online Mapping

Use Sustrans' online mapping to find ways to get out more by foot and bike and discover your local area. Enter a postcode, location or National Cycle Network route name at www.sustrans.org.uk/map

Maps on your Phone

Sustrans has now released 'The complete National Cycle Network' app with which you can access over 25,000 miles of walking and cycling network across the UK, anytime, anywhere.

The free app is available to download from the iTunes store or Android Marketplace

Free your bike

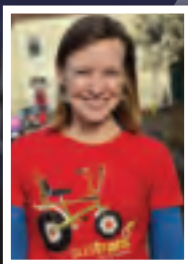
Want to know where to cycle?
Get your free information pack.

Send off for a handy information pack put together especially for you by Sustrans, the charity behind the UK's 13,000 miles of National Cycle Network. The free pack contains details of great cycle routes in your region, including routes on traffic-free paths which are ideal if you need to build up your confidence in safe surroundings. The pack also comes with top tips for family cycle trips.

To get your free pack, visit:

www.freeyourbike.org.uk





I've been supporting Sustrans for five years now, and they really are doing some fantastic work. Sustrans wants to make it easier, safer and more pleasant for you to cycle, as part of their aim to bring healthy and sustainable travel choices to the whole country.

Miranda Krestovnikoff, zoologist and TV presenter

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable.

We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices.

Make your move and support Sustrans today.

www.sustrans.org.uk



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